

**Michael A. Lane**

November 7, 2007

Deborah Hirst  
Project Manager  
State Coastal Conservancy  
1330 Broadway, 13<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Oakland, CA 94612

Re: St. Orres Creek Beach Access, Mendocino Co. California  
Redwood Coast Land Conservancy (RCLC)

**BACKGROUND**

When we met in Gualala, I briefly described the topographic and geologic difficulties involved with beach access at this location. You mentioned that a written summary of our discussion would be helpful, hence this letter.

**SITE OVERVIEW**

St. Orres Creek is located 2.5 miles north of Gualala, in southwestern Mendocino County. The creek has eroded a narrow and deep (up to 100 feet) ravine which widens to an attractive sandy "pocket" beach. Highway One crosses the creek by means of a massive engineered fill.

**BEACH ACCESS PROJECT**

The beach access trail conceptual design has four components:

- 1      Parking on the west side of Highway One, south side of St. Orres Creek
- 2      Trail extending northward from the parking area, parallel to Highway One, along the Caltrans easement and on the engineered fill.
- 3      Improvement of the existing informal trail on the north side of St. Orres Creek, from the Caltrans easement to the RCLC access easement
- 4      Access, possibly via cable steps, from the improved trail to the beach.

Existing access is accomplished via the unimproved route described above, or via a steep trail from the parking area directly down to stream level, following the route of an existing storm drain. The lower part of this route traverses the riparian zone.

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**TOPOGRAPHIC & GEOLOGIC CONSTRAINTS**

The existing informal beach access follows the Steep north bank of St. Orres Creek. The bank at that point is approximately 100 feet high, the trail is about 20 - 30 feet above stream level. Bank slopes average 45 degrees, or a 100 percent slope. The bedrock is generally weathered sandstone, but in the area where the trail is washed out, the sandstone is in fault contact with softer shales of the Anchor Bay member of the Gualala Formation.

The consequences of this are in my opinion:

- 1) Simple widening of the current trail is not feasible, or where feasible is not sustainable, due to the steep slope and in places relatively incompetent rock formations.
- 2) An engineered solution such as a cantilevered walkway would be subject to unknown but possibly significant maintenance costs due to upslope soil creep and even rockfalls.
- 3) There is some potential safety hazard to people using the trail or improved walkway due to the steep upslope areas and soil conditions noted above. This, in turn, could pose a liability issue for RCLC.


**OPTIONS**

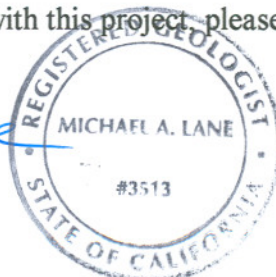
The following are the most obvious possibilities, there are undoubtedly others. No opinion is rendered on the options; that is a matter for the RCLC Board.

- 1 Continue with the original access concept. In this case, the project is basically an engineering exercise. I will be pleased to suggest potential resources.
- 2 Modify the project to provide access to a viewing platform. The platform presumably would need to be on the RCLC access easement, otherwise the need for the easement is non-existent.
- 3 Relinquish the easement, possibly citing unknown future costs and safety/liability issues.

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Thank you for the opportunity to assist with this project, please let me know if you have questions.

  
Michael A. Lane, Ph.D.  
California Registered Geologist #3513







# REDWOOD COAST LAND CONSERVANCY

*Dedicated to protection of open spaces and natural resources from the Navarro to the Russian rivers*

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By this agreement, the Redwood Coast Land Conservancy (RCLC), a California non-profit corporation, incorporated and qualified as a 501(c)(3) organization, undertakes to manage a coastal public access easement providing vertical pedestrian access from State Highway 1 to a scenic overlook of St. Orres Creek and St. Orres beach. This easement was created voluntarily and transferred directly by the property owners, John and Mary Sue Erickson, to the Redwood Coast Land Conservancy. This transfer was formalized in a Grant Deed of Public Access Easement and filed with the Mendocino County Recorder on July 3, 2002. The easement area is a portion of Assessor's Parcel No. 144-130-37.

## BACKGROUND

The property owners herein were willing to voluntarily grant the easement to RCLC in furtherance of the public right to have access to the State tidelands, on the condition that RCLC would maintain appropriate liability insurance covering the easement area in which the property owners would be included as additional insureds, for their protection.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this easement is to permanently protect and allow vertical and safe access to views at the mouth of St. Orres Creek at Gualala, California. The first section of the trail from the highway trailhead runs about 190 feet roughly parallel to and below State Highway 1 to a point where it joins the existing rough trail leading to a platform. The potential exists for improved beach access at some future date, as described below.

## CONSTRUCTION/OPERATION

The easement area presently includes an existing informal trail leading from Highway 1 down to the ocean beach at the mouth of St. Orres Creek, a portion of which can be improved for regular public use. However, before attempting to provide safe access along this route, which would require extensive and complex engineering, due to the geologic formation and riparian environment in this narrow cove, RCLC will first address improvements along only the upper portion of that trail. Consequently, RCLC plans to construct the trail as described below - along the CALTRANS (California State Department of Transportation) easement to the upper portion of the current trail to a Viewing Platform as close as possible to St. Orres Beach. Interpretive signage on the local geology, fauna and flora, and tidal effects on the area and creek will be installed on this platform. After platform construction has been completed, if a feasibility study suggests beach access is possible, without unduly disturbing the riparian environment, RCLC may apply for another permit to provide such access. Since

St. Orres Management Plan Nov. 7, 2007 *df*



the current trailhead on Highway 1 has been deemed unsafe because there is no highway shoulder area at this point or nearby, it was necessary to consult with the (CALTRANS) concerning moving the trailhead about 170 feet south to an existing paved highway parking area, where there is ample room for parking and pedestrian access. CALTRANS, whose highway right-of-way includes all of the new trail construction section, has approved these access and proposed trail plans and granted RCLC an Encroachment Permit. The physical improvements needed include an engineered trail across CALTRANS property, signage per the Signage Plan, brush clearing along the trail, leveling, widening and hardening, installation of steps in some places, and repairing erosion and improvement of drainage through ditching and placement of culverting. RCLC has met with CalTrans on site and is providing a detailed plan for the new trail construction and platform, as well as improvements to the portion of the existing trail that will be utilized. This plan will be submitted to the the Coastal Conservancy, CalTrans, and the Mendocino County Planning Department, for consideration and/or approval of any required permits. Upon obtaining the permit approval, RCLC shall submit the approved plan to the California Coastal Commission for approval and any subsequent amendment of this Management Plan. Only after the approvals have been obtained from the County, the Coastal Conservancy, the Coastal Commission, and CALTRANS shall RCLC begin the search for a contractor to oversee installation of the improvements. It is agreed the there will be no lighting or toilet facilities.

#### MAINTENANCE/LIABILITY

RCLC volunteers will monitor the site monthly to ensure that the trail, signs, stairs, etc. are in good condition. RCLC shall be responsible for all maintenance of the easement area. Any trash found will be removed immediately. RCLC currently has and will continue to maintain appropriate liability insurance for all claims arising out of the public use of the easement area. RCLC has appropriate insurance in the aggregate amount of \$3,000,000.

#### AMENDMENT

This plan may be amended, if needed, with concurrence of both signatories.

#### ANNUAL REPORT

In October of each year, RCLC will submit an annual report to the Coastal Commission and the Coastal Conservancy. This report shall include the status of the trail and viewpoint, an estimate of the number of users, any issues associated with public use, the amount of trash removed, and any complaints received.

*St. Orres Management Plan Nov. 7, 2007* JF